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WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM,
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA
AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

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REVIEW OF REPORTS, STUDIES AND OTHER DOCUMENTATION FOR THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE AND THE WORLD CONFERENCE

Contribution*/ submitted by the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities

The secretariat has received the following contribution which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 February 2001]

*/ This contribution is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

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The question of finding a solution to the problem of racism is intensely involved with humankind's search for justice, development, protection and liberation as well as for economic and politico-military power, domination and exploitation. There is no doubt that in the search for the latter, negative attitudes to and conceptualizations of others are formed, promoted and often acted upon as a consequence of their being useful to the quest for domination and superiority. Once locked into place, they are difficult to remove, even after their *raison d'être* is removed. Thus we must ask if racist attitudes represent only the surface manifestations of much deeper human developmental problematics which the right to self-determination attempts to address through distributive and restorative justice. Is racism simply the visible tip of the iceberg?

In consequence, we feel that the Agenda of the World Conference on Racism should include an exploration of the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between the denial of the right to self-determination by the dominant majority of a multinational state and the creation or promotion of some form of racism?

2. Do policies of forced assimilation like those being followed in America in relation to African and Native American minorities, etc. automatically promote racial bias or discrimination as a non-intentional but necessary component for policy realization?

3. Does the classification of ethnic groups into caste categories with the effect of forced unequal status assimilation generate the perpetuation of racism and racial discrimination?

While the above are only a few of the factors involved in creating situations to promote racism and racial discrimination, IHRAAM feels that if such factors and their historical and future implications are not accorded appropriate research-action-policy recognition, racism and racial discrimination will always have a politico-economic and social beachhead upon which to sustain its destructive emanations.

The socio-economic development of individuals and non-dominant groups inside of states and their ability to exercise their economic and social rights can be discouraged through the effort by majority-dominated governments to misconstrue and limit any minority development that may seek a more equitable institutional division of socio-political and economic power between dominant and minority groups, by misapplying and misinterpreting the great democratic concepts of non-discrimination and majority rule in such a manner as to perpetuate majority domination and exploitation. Needless to say, this may be a greater threat to the global acceptance of democracy and the achievement of peace than the appropriate promotion of self-determination. It would not be wrong to assume that such misuse of democratic principles damages practice as well as international peace by decreasing their credibility as tools for conflict resolution and state integration.

Where this occurs, minorities too may suffer from socio-economic maldevelopment rooted in historical circumstances forced on them by what the majority calls "majority rules", even when the state wherein they reside is identified as among the world's most developed. Indigenous peoples often refer to this phenomenon of group-based underdevelopment – occurring in developed states – as Fourth World colonization.

Racist attitudes and consequent discrimination is usually given by states as the reason for the maldevelopment of such nondominant groups relative to dominant groups in such states, and the solution voiced by governments is simply the dropping of racist attitudes, concepts, overt racist institutions, the same treatment or opportunity for all, etc., which is defined as non-discrimination, equality before the law and equal opportunity. There is little or no comment where ethnic minorities are concerned on the need for types of institutional changes and special measures or self-determination required to assure that the international legal concept of non-discrimination in relation to minorities is in effect and thus actual discrimination against such groups is ended.

Many such states wishfully take great pride in their melting-pot assimilationist policies or traditions as proof of their commitment to non-discrimination against minorities. But there can be a gross contradiction between non-discrimination as defined by international law, and their melting pot policies or traditions which may often serve as a linguistic euphemism and cover for what may in reality be the forced assimilation of certain minorities and indigenous peoples, and the resultant retardation of their socio-economic and cultural development by the state in which they live.

In reality, when enforced by government in conjunction with societal institutions, melting pot policies become a chief reason for institutional and systemic racial discrimination in states where indigenous peoples and descendants of forced immigrants to the Americas are found. As a matter of fact, the advocacy by government of policies of the melting pot in relation to such minorities, i.e. indigenous peoples, "involuntary immigrants" (the terminology currently in UN usage to describe descendants of Africans in the Americas), etc., automatically promotes and necessitates racial or ethnic discrimination. This is true if for no other reason than that in order to force or pressure a minority to assimilate into some sector, particularly the lower caste or underclass, of the dominant majority, the culture of the minority has to be re-identified as that of the dominant group's lower caste or underclass, and by this means be devalued in the cultural mindset not only of the dominant group, but often among a significant number of the minority itself as well, leading to its being distorted, shattered or rendered dysfunctional to the minorities' equal status acceptance in the state, and consequently to the minority's development.

If the minority nation resists, they face the prospect of being classified as separatists, and can expect greater oppression.

When a minority is subjected to the process of forced assimilation, what happens to minority individuals who resist assimilation yet must necessarily seek to actualize their economic and social rights in the majority-dominated mainstream – to compete for

employment or educational achievement, etc.? How is their access to health care affected; their community solidarity and cooperation; their right to significant input into the use of their taxes, or into the orientations and norms of the public institutions which purport to serve them, etc? Indeed, how does this affect their capacity to develop compared to individuals in the dominant group? For a vivid and empirical response to this question, one need only statistically observe the situation of the indigenous peoples and descendants of "involuntary immigrants" in the states where such policies are practiced. In one such state, as an instance, the descendants of formerly enslaved Africans suffered an unemployment rate of 43% in 1993. In that same state, among the indigenous population, the rate of tuberculosis was 400% higher, meningitis 2000 % higher, and dysentery 10,000% higher than the national average.

If the historical consequences of policies have no significance for how they are defined, the search for peace need not include the search for human rights and justice. We would only be required to continuously redefine problems and situations in such a way as to obscure them while pleasing those in power. The UN must accept that real history determines real situations and their concomitant inescapable needs which in turn require truly functional solutions. Ethnic racism, systemic discrimination, and their negative socio-economic consequences for development of national minorities will not be eliminated by permitting forced assimilation to masquerade under the banner of non-discrimination or a melting pot, thus preventing effective access of those who need it most to the institutions and policies necessary for them to achieve the right to equal status development.

Even recent history clearly demonstrates that policies of forced assimilation lead to maldevelopment, which leads to protest, and eventually the rejection of state jurisdiction or the demand for political independence, which in turn animates ethnic cleansing, civil conflict, societal disintegration, etc. Both voluntary assimilation (fusion) and appropriate development occur best where equal status socio-political and economic interdependency between groups is provided for in an environment of consociated, human-centered democracy.

We are pleased to note that the UN Sub-Commission will be considering the recommendation by the UN Working Group on Minorities (UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/27) that a Regional Conference be held on the situation of the descendants of Africans in the Americas. We hope that, in giving consideration to this recommendation, the Sub-Commission as well as the World Conference Against Racism will remain aware of the problematics mentioned, particularly as it relates to the possible misinterpretation and frequent misuse of the concept of non-discrimination in relation to some national minorities, and the limitation of their minority rights to non-discrimination, as politically interpreted by the states concerned. We suggest that in its deliberations, attention should be paid by the World Conference Against Racism to the misuse and corruption of the concept of majority rules in order to maintain domination of national minorities in all levels of their participation in government and socio-economic policy-making, thereby eliminating their right to effective participation.